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ABSTRACT

A family education program based principally upon reading is outlined in this paper. Following a discussion of the program's background and of proposals for its expansion, the paper describes booklets used in a campaign designed to help parents understand their role in their children's education. The following section outlines new methods of book distribution used in the program, including the use of school bookstore programs and paperback racks in day care centers, and discusses the cost of these methods. The final section covers the role of the American Reading Council in informing parents, librarians, educators, and the general public about how to operate the programs and about other programs that are successful in getting people to read. (FL)

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THE AMERICAN READING COUNCIL'S EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS FOR FAMILIES

1. Bookmobile and Community Library Programs

Background

The American Reading Council's programs stem in part from the experience of running a special kind of Bookmobile Service for three years in the Bushwick/ Bedford-Stuyvesant area of Brooklyn.

Staffed by local people of the kind we were anxious to reach (high school dropouts, unmarried parents, ex-gypsy taxicab drivers and others) and with carefully-selected books, we soon had over 1,000 people a week coming aboard and borrowing books. These were people who were not using their school or public library. Yet the books we carried meant so much to them that our rate of return was a phenomenal 90%.

One of our most interesting side projects was giving summer employment to educationally and economically disadvantaged 14 year olds. These young people, hired to work 20 hours a week, became so enthusiastic about their jobs that most worked an additional 10 or 15 hours as volunteers. All went ahead two or three years in reading skills and learned the important basic job skills of punctuality, dealing with the public and the need to get along with one's fellow employees, even if they are not your age or your kind of people. They all also had a lot of fun doing publicity for the project, story telling to groups of young children and working with young children to find the books they wanted and, in some instances, to improve their reading skills.

Experiences on this Bookmobile reinforced a number of conclusions which I had reached earlier as a result of ten years as a School Volunteer in various inner-city areas of New York.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
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CS 004862

1. Most parents in such areas are desperately anxious to help their children and are well aware that education is the road out of the ghetto.

2. Most parents I met were intelligent, badly educated, and unaware of the potential of the early years as well as the importance of the power of example.

3. Most were eager for guidance and were not getting it from any source. There was no material available on their reading level nor was there any personal guidance.

4. In most areas, there is nothing like a YMCA, no community center, no organization to act as a community catalyst.

5. There is virtually no recreational provision for teen-agers.

6. The local public libraries are very under utilized for a variety of reasons:

   a) The staff is unaccustomed to working closely with the various vigorous community groups such as block associations, storefront church congregations and other groups including the Muslims, Youth In Action, the Urban League, OIC, NAACP, etc.

   b) Great emphasis is laid on library cards. It often seemed as if the library card was more important than the child. On the Bookmobile, we kept all library cards and no one was ever in trouble over a lost library card.

   c) Fines. Many children's librarians say they remit fines in hardship cases. Most parents don't like to be put in a hardship category and once an over-due notice has been sent, either stay away from the library or pay the fine and then stay away and order the children to stay away. (We had no fines on the Bookmobile.)

   d) Rules for silence. Many Caribbean and black people feel uncomfortable and unhappy in a hushed atmosphere. Yet libraries enforce a rule of QUIET for the benefit of a tiny minority of users instead of creating a separate quiet area and turning the balance of the library into a cheerful meeting place.

e) Inappropriate materials. On the Bookmobile, we carried a rich variety of high interest paperbacks (with special emphasis on books of interest to blacks and Puerto Ricans), face out in multiple copies, arranged by category with no separation by age group. Anyone could find what he wanted and could pick from any category. Many senior citizens loved Bible stories on a fourth grade reading level, many people in their 20's and 30's borrowed science books and biographies on a fifth grade reading level. A life of Willie Mays or Martin Luther King, Jr. looks, in paperback, like anyone's book. In the library, patrons who enjoyed these books were sent to the children's room or a special Adult Elementary section where the same books in hard cover were in so childish a format they did not want to appear with them in public.

f) Constraints about venturing into new neighborhoods. Many children fear attack (often with justification) if the path to the library takes them out of their "territory" and into a stranger's. Furthermore, many Hispanic girls are not allowed by their parents to go out of their immediate neighborhood. I am confident both these problems can be solved.

As a result of these and other experiences, the American Reading Council has designed a combined Bookmobile and Community Library Program. The Bookmobile, described in greater detail in Exhibit A, is patterned on the original one run in the Bushwick/Bedford-Stuyvesant area in Brooklyn. Its purpose is to reach the many people in inner-city areas who have never had any pleasurable or useful experience with books and get them reading. Once they are started, the Bookmobile staff can help them move on to the Community Library.

The Community Library (which can be installed in a storefront as a new library or created with rule changes and some physical changes in an existing branch library) will offer the following services:

First and foremost:

1. It will offer a Reading Center which will simply be a large paperback library arranged as on the Bookmobile and with similar rules, including a lot of cheerful conversation.

2. It will offer part-time child care for three hours or less for preschool children under the supervision of a

professional assisted by cooperative students. This will attract to the library young parents who otherwise might not come. It will give overburdened parents a little freedom--a very important factor in parenthood. It will expose the child to reading aloud, to stories and to the kind of toys which give prereading skills. It will give the staff a chance to explain the importance of the preschool years and to create a clientele for workshops in parent education.

3. Once the understanding and demand has been created, we will give such workshops, and supply materials to enable parents to help their children at home.

4. The library will offer an after-school book and game club for elementary and junior high children run by junior high and high school students under the supervision of an adult professional. These games will range from "Go Fish", a simple kind of consonant gin rummy which gives a recognition vocabulary, to "Wif-N-Pruf", the game of logic. The student assistants will be taught how to play the games so they can teach others. Any middle-class person who spends much time with inner-city children is struck by the lack of games. Cards seem to be a rarity and paper and pencil games such as categories, hangman--even tick-tack-toe--are nonexistent. Many of these games teach important skills and some are excellent teaching tools for reading and math. The game club will be held in an area full of colorful paperbacks. The games will attract many children who would not normally come to a library. Yet there will be some who will find pleasure in the books and the non-readers will be influenced by their peers to try a few titles themselves.

5. A quiet area where those who want to study in peace can do so. If possible, senior citizen volunteers will be recruited to man this room to help anyone who wants it with homework difficulties.

6. The ARC expects to work with either Laubach Literacy or Literacy Volunteers to create a literacy volunteer unit. The New York City School Volunteer Program has found that it is difficult to recruit any substantial number of well-educated volunteers such as usually work for Laubach Literacy and Literacy Volunteers to go to an inner-city facility to serve the community. They have also discovered that community people of poor educational background can give important educational help once they

have been persuaded that they can do so. I am hoping to get one or the other of these two splendid literacy organizations to train community people to help functional illiterates almost along the lines of Frank Laubach's slogan, "Each one teach one".

7. A successful Community Library should become a community education, information and recreation center. It should become the catalyst for helping the people of the neighborhood to solve some of their pressing problems. For example, in many low-income neighborhoods viable public housing is being destroyed by a small group of people, often adolescents. Yet I am told, that in many parts of the country where such public housing is tenant managed (or, even better, tenant owned and managed) this problem has been solved. Workshops with film and slide presentations could be given on tenant management.

   Another urgent problem is that of making the streets safe. In many areas, older people are afraid to go out after dark and many youngsters are afraid to leave their own four or five block territory. Yet in some areas, this problem is being solved by creating teenage escort services for senior citizens and by creating "safe routes" to centers such as the library by recruiting adult volunteers (home-bound people such as housewives and senior citizens) to keep watch out the windows. I know of an Hispanic neighborhood where parents who previously would not allow their children to go to the library are now, with a "safe route" system, enthusiastically encouraging such visits. The Community Library should be able to reach such a high percentage of the population that it becomes the focal point for solving these and other local problems.

An important element in this library concept is its governance. The Community Library will act in conjunction with a local Bookmobile service of the kind described in Exhibit A. This service will be administered by a board of 12 trustees, a majority of whom live in the area to be served. A minority will be recruited from members of such national organizations as the ARC, the National Council of Negro Women, the National Conference of Christians and Jews and others. The function of the latter will be to provide a breadth and an expertise not available to local people. An even more important function will be to protect the local people from undue political pressures as to jobs and services by such trustees' knowledge of and ability to use the media. I had a number of local people on the board of trustees of my Bookmobile Service. They were

invaluable in ensuring that the service was in fact meeting community needs and, since they lived right where the service was, were instantly aware of whether or not it was being well run. They chose the Bookmobile stops and helped to alert the community to the service available. Unfortunately, after the ARC and I withdrew, they were not able to protect the service from local politicians and its usefulness was destroyed, although the Federal funds continued to flow for another seven years. This experience has led to the plan outlined above.

For several years now, I have been looking for a library which was interested in helping the Reading Council create such a Community Library. Within the last year, two such libraries have appeared. The Newark Public Library, which has long been community oriented, is very anxious to undertake this innovative service. The board of trustees has voted enthusiastically to support the ARC in every way it can. (It cannot supply funding but is willing to supply an inner-city branch as the basic Community Library. This building with its utilities and staff will constitute in effect an annual contribution of $75,000.00 toward the program.) I have explored in depth with the director, as well as the head of the branch libraries and the director of the outreach programs for the library, how to go about creating such a Community Library and find that we agree on every point. I also have the backing in Newark of the mayor, the Prudential Insurance Company, which has been a leader of the business community in helping Newark, and of many other community organizations. These people are confident that we can recruit potential trustees like the ones mentioned above. One trustee of the Newark Public Library is a very able lawyer who was born and grew up in the Central Ward and attributes his escape to the help of the now under-utilized branch library. Another trustee is a minister of the local Baptist church.*

The Newark Public Library is unusual (in my experience of urban public libraries) in that it has recruited a group of local people to act as a Community Advisory Board in every area where it has a branch. Some of these people can undoubtedly act as a nucleus for the Bookmobile board of trustees.

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* Since I first wrote this in 1978, the Newark Public Library has acquired a new director and three new trustees. The new director is as enthusiastic over the program as was the former director and I assume that this would be equally true of the new trustees, but I have not wanted to present it to the board until the ARC had some solid expectation of funding.

The New York Public Library has expressed a strong interest in a similar Community Library for the community in East Harlem. The ARC has already had requests from many community people both in Newark and East Harlem for a Bookmobile service such as the one I ran in Brooklyn. We have explained that we are unwilling to start such a service without following through with the Community Library which can welcome the Bookmobile graduates and serve the community in general.

The ARC will, of course, work closely with the New York Public Library, whether or not the Community Library was housed in one of their branch libraries or in a separate storefront facility. It seems likely that a separate facility would be more useful since the New York Public Library can only offer part of an existing building and it would appear difficult if not impossible to operate two libraries with different philosophies and different sets of rules in the same building.

Budgets for both the Bookmobile service and the Community Library service are attached.

One of the attractive aspects of these proposals is the fact that the Newark project would serve a predominantly black, low-income group and would be working with a library that is very closely linked with the local public schools and local day care centers.

The East Harlem program would serve a predominantly low-income, Hispanic population and would be working with a library which gives minimal, if any, service to local day care centers and is not in close rapport with the local school system. Thus, although the two programs are not far apart geographically, they are nevertheless very different.

Both the Bookmobile and Community Library programs are designed to complement existing library services. The Bookmobile service is intended to be a first educational step for non-library users. The Community Library will be the second educational step. In Newark, the Central Ward Branch is large enough to accommodate both the Community Library services and the larger book and media collection a conventional library would supply. The philosophy of that library also seems to be such that the role of community catalyst would be congenial to it.

In East Harlem it would appear that the Community Library (in a separate facility) would attract community leaders and others as a community center on an ongoing basis. However, as an educational facility, the ARC would expect those who were well started by its services up the educational ladder, to move on to branches and other facilities of the New York Public Library.

2. Parent Education Booklet Program

There is much evidence that parents can make a very great difference in their children's academic achievement. People who have had long experience in the field such as Nancy Larrick, well-known author of A Parent's Guide to Children's Reading, Glen Doman, author of How to Teach Your Baby to Read, and Gregory & Patricia Sims, creators of the New Approach Method, confirm the fact that children who are engaged in conversation from an early age, read to daily and see their parents reading, learn to read easily and well at an early age. Many normal three and four year olds are learning to read and loving it. The head of one of our major urban libraries, whose family was very poor, learned, with his mother's help, to read from the newspapers before he was four. This man feels that the self-confidence he acquired from learning to read so young, led to his successful career.

All parents CAN do this for their children even if the parents are low income, are not themselves well educated and, perhaps, do not speak English well or at all. Almost all parents WOULD do this if they understood that they were able to and were told how. While the best time to start is in infancy, Jesse Jackson and others are showing that parents can have a major beneficial effect on their children's schooling at any age once they know what to do.

The American Reading Council's experiences with parents of every income group have made it clear that there is a need for parent education. Based on its earlier successful publications, the ARC wants to prepare five booklets, all entitled "Help Your Child at Home to Become a Reader". Each will address parents of different age groups: children 3 and under; children 4 and 5 years old; children 9 through 12 years old; and teenagers. All will be written in simple, direct language with detailed suggestions as to how to help. All will stress the four basic principles that create a reader: 1) Self-confidence; 2) The ability to speak fluently and to put one's thoughts into words (in any language); 3) The desire to read; and 4) The pleasure principle, i.e., a child who reads for pleasure reads for life. (A child who reads for school reads as little as possible.) All the booklets will have concrete suggestions as to how parents may get access to books, as well as helpful bibliographies. Each booklet will be under 50 pages. To reach all parents, the print will be large and there will be many photographs and line drawings.

It is planned that these booklets will be advertised to parents on TV and radio through public service announcements, both by personnel of the ARC and by others. We are confident that many celebrities, both minorities and others, would be glad to contribute their time for such a cause.

In addition to distributing the booklets as a response to the ads described above, we want to distribute the booklets in as many ways as possible. One way that has not yet been fully utilized is through the health care system which reaches almost all parents including those of newborns. The American Reading Council hopes to explore ways of distributing the booklet through hospitals, well-baby clinics and health centers and pediatricians. We expect to get in touch with the American Pediatric Society in connection with this.

3. New Methods of Book Distribution

There is no use telling parents to read to their children every day (four states now have or shortly will have "Parents As Reading Partners" campaigns under way) and to read in front of their children unless those parents have a ready access to books. While many public libraries do an excellent job in serving their communities, there is no question that many people have never in their lives used a library and find it hard to do so either for geographic reasons or for the reasons listed above (see Pages 2 and 3).

The American Reading Council feels it is very important to have books available in places where children and parents normally congregate.

A. School Bookstore Program:

One such place is the elementary school. The ARC wants to give schools the technical assistance and, in some instances, the working capital to start paperback bookstores in elementary schools and junior high schools. These stores can be run by the students themselves as a form of career education and open for parents and teachers to buy books in. Several such stores exist and wherever they do, reading scores and school library use have soared. In the opinion of the ARC, a career school bookstore is the optimum model but there are also a number of these stores being run by the parents themselves as an outgrowth of an especially successful school book fair. Some of these school bookstores (of both kinds) have been in existence in this country for 14 years. There are now nearly 7,000 school bookstores in England and their number is increasing rapidly. In England, in low-income areas, some of these stores also run a modest lending library for parents. Experience has shown that parents who had never wanted or felt able to buy, after they had been persuaded to borrow a few times, later returned, bought books and were grateful for the opportunity. In New York City in many Title I schools, a room has been set aside for parents. The ARC wants to suggest ways for parents to get paperback books to create lending libraries in these parents' rooms.

B. Paperback Racks in Day Care Centers:

In New York City, day care centers in low-income areas have no budget for books for either children or parents to take home. Most of them have no libraries nor any library service except for an occasional bus trip (for the older ones) to a library for a story hour or a movie.

The ARC is anxious to put racks of paperbacks into the day care centers for sale or loan to parents, not only in New York City but also wherever they are needed. While in some cities, such as St. Louis, day care centers get splendid library service in the center, families still do not have books available at home for reading to their children. Yet it is often these parents who have the least time to go to a library. Experience has shown that parents of day care children in every income group are very grateful for the opportunity to buy good, inexpensive books for the family. Again, the role of the ARC would be to provide expertise to the day care centers or the agency responsible for them. It will prepare appropriate bibliographies, alert them to varying sources of inexpensive books such as local jobbers, national jobbers and even hard cover remainder houses and help with locating display materials and bookcases as well as providing working capital.

COST OF NEW METHODS OF BOOK DISTRIBUTION

What does it cost to create and run a school bookstore. This is difficult to say since so much depends on the scope of the program. In general, the cost is low since both rent and help are free.

A budget for this program is difficult to set since much depends on the scope of the program. A school bookstore needs bookcases, sales slips and record keeping material, a second hand or toy cash register and an initial inventory. Many schools have found that the parents association is able to donate or make bookcases and that the school itself has a toy cash register. Thus the only real expense is the working capital needed to pay for the initial inventory. This can run from $350.00 to $1,000.00 depending on the size of the school. Of course, this money will be repaid but it will always be needed for the next inventory.

The day care program again will need working capital and bookcases and again the budget will depend on the size of the center's population and the number of centers to be served. Both programs will require the services of a full-time professional on the ARC staff.

1. The American Reading Council's Dissemination Program

The ARC has prepared and is preparing a number of manuals and articles for librarians, teachers and others so that ARC's successful programs can be carried out in many areas.

Our bookmobile manual "How to Create Readers in Low-Income Areas Through a Book Wagon Service" is not well-known but is valued where it is received. (See attached letter).

Our school bookstore manual "How to Start and Run a School Bookstore," written with the help of experienced school bookstore personnel as well as the education director of the American Booksellers Association, is also being well received.

In 1976, there were a number of school bookstores in England but the school bookstore plan was not generally well known to school personnel or to parents. Then the National Book League founded the School Bookshop Association with considerable publicity, published a manual and started a quarterly magazine of articles, book reviews and feedback. In the last four years, the number of school bookstores in England has more than doubled, and these stores are changing the distribution in England of children's books in a highly beneficial way which is having a major impact on family reading habits. (The school bookstore movement has also helped the British publishing industry.)

Both the bookmobile and school bookstore manuals are being distributed in typescript and are very drab, which makes their favorable reception even more impressive.

Other articles which have met with a good reception are: "An Open Letter to Librarians" published in "Top of the News" Autumn, 1977 and "Let's Get Them Reading" published in "The Bookmark" Winter, 1977. Unfortunately, these periodicals do not have a very wide circulation, but where the suggestions in the articles have been implemented, we are told that circulation has risen.

Violence in the schools is a matter of great national concern. Not only is the general public very unhappy and worried about violence in our schools, educators know that children cannot learn if they are afraid.

The ARC was successful sometime ago in introducting to Eastern Maine the Glasser "Schools Without Failure" Method of handling individuals who are behaving irresponsibly in school. The method has been highly successful wherever it has been tried, but a need has been expressed for further material which will help the classroom teacher to create a non-violent, cooperative learning environment. The ARC is helping to disseminate "The Children's

Creative Response to Conflict" material. This material has been created by the Quaker Project on Community Conflict of the New York Yearly Meeting of Friends. It is a system which enables the classroom teacher to create a good learning environment and to begin to solve the problem of classroom conflict in a constructive way. The project gives workshops for teachers and also publishes a very helpful manual. The CCRC method has been and is being used very successfully both in New York City and in Nashville, Tennessee, as well as in a few other schools in other areas.

The ARC is monitoring schools where this material is in use and wants, when our data is complete, to publish an article for parents, educators and the general public, entitled "Creating Responsible Children: Two Successful Methods of Combatting Violence in the Classroom".

BOOKMOBILE PROPOSAL

Proposal Abstract

Funds are required to start a special kind of bookmobile service in an inner-city area. This service is designed to take people who have never had any pleasurable or useful experience with books, get them reading and help them to continue their education at their community library.

The service, which has already been successfully operated as a demonstration program in Brooklyn, creates new readers of all ages, educates parents on how to help their children, trains and employs community people, especially teenagers, and acts as a neighborhood catalyst and information center.

American Reading Council bookmobiles are successful because:

1. Books are carefully selected by someone with an intimate knowledge of the community being served.
2. Paperbacks are enticingly displayed.
3. The staff comes from the community, has a similar income level, and relates in a warm manner to the bookmobile users.
4. Simplified procedures are used for checking out books.

The two areas which are anxious to have such a service and which research indicates would prove fruitful territory for such a service are East Harlem and Newark. Letters from community leaders, in both areas, in support of this project are available.

I. Purpose

The primary purpose of an American Reading Council bookmobile is to create new readers. It is not a substitute for school or public libraries, but a means of attracting people who have heretofore not been readers. These people

are ready to begin using their community library after a period of 12 to 14 weeks of using books from the bookmobile.

Two additional functions of the bookmobile are:

1. Training of functionally illiterate teenagers (12 to 16 per year).

2. Acting as a neighborhood catalyst in communicating information between different groups. This is accomplished both by the display of posters, flyers, meeting notices, pamphlets, and by the day-to-day conversation between the staff of the bookmobile and its clients.

II. How It Works

A truck fitted out with shelves designed to carry paperbacks face out and with other library fittings, and including a generator for interior lighting and heat is required. It is essential that the books be properly displayed in order for inexperienced readers to find what they want. The truck follows a weekly schedule of regular visits to day care centers, public housing projects, and other areas chosen by the staff and trustees. Simple procedures are used to encourage new readers to use the service. Library cards are kept on file at the bookmobile, thus eliminating the problem of lost cards which often prevent children from checking out books at more formally run libraries. There are no fines, but only one book may be checked out at a time. It must be returned prior to receiving another.

The prototype bookmobile service operated along these lines in the Bushwick/Bedford-Stuyvesant area of Brooklyn from July 5, 1967 through September 1969. It served approximately 25,000 people a year and loaned over 45,000 books annually with a return rate of over 90%.

III. Staffing

It is essential that a skilled full-time librarian be hired. Not only is his or her expertise and guidance necessary for the proper training of the remainder of the staff, but a librarian's knowledge of available books, coupled with daily contact with the bookmobile's special public makes possible the book selection which is vital to intrigue new

readers. Such a librarian must be a minority group person familiar with the community and sensitive to its needs. He or she will also need to smooth the way for the transition to using more formal library sources as the bookmobile clients begin to need a wider selection of books.

The librarian needs to be assisted by a reliable driver who is trained to double as a library assistant. Four co-operative* students (that is, two students at a time) are also needed on the bookmobile, making a regular bookmobile staff of four. In addition, a part-time secretary and a part-time clerk will also be needed.

In the spring and summer months, additional teenagers will be needed since the bookmobile's circulation increases greatly in warm months. Experience has shown that six added teenagers can be useful at any one time, and that 14 and 15 year olds working after school in term time and 20 hours a week in summer enormously increase the scope of the service as well as training the young people involved. Most of those employed by the prototype bookmobile moved ahead three or four years in reading ability during the summer as well as acquiring such essential job skills as promptness, reliability, and the ability to work with a variety of people.

IV. Governance

A thorny question throughout the country has been the problem of administration of funds for social welfare purposes in inner-city areas. Government funds, which have usually been administered by a paid bureaucracy, have sometimes been diverted either through fraud or incompetence from delivering the services to those for whom they were intended.

A board of trustees, the majority of whom live and work in the community being served, can see to it that the service is meeting community needs and can alert the staff to what those needs are. They will also be helpful in letting community people know the service is available. These people should be drawn from the leadership of the local community, whether as volunteer activists or as elected leaders of local organizations. People of high calibre who are willing to give their

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* Co-operative students work one week and attend school one week.

time and energy to serve as such trustees have been identified in the two communities researched for the project. The remaining membership should come from national organizations, who can provide outside expertise when needed, assist with locating funding sources not easily accessible to minority communities, and provide protection to local members who may from time to time be put under political pressure to use the patronage available through the bookmobile in undesirable ways.

EXHIBIT D

CHATTAHOOCHEE VALLEY REGIONAL LIBRARY
BRADLEY MEMORIAL LIBRARY, HEADQUARTERS
1120 BRADLEY DRIVE
COLUMBUS, GEORGIA 31906

November 29, 1978

OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR
(404) 327-0211

Ms. Julia R. Palmer
American Reading Council
20 West 40 Street
New York, N.Y. 10018

Dear Ms. Palmer:

Thank you so much for sending me the wonderful material on your Book Wagon. It is very useful to us and leads to many useful innovations in our program of service. Although our population is mostly rural and yours is urban, the needs are similar, as are the characteristics of low-income and education. So I am extremely grateful to you.

I am interested in learning more about the Parent Education Comic Book Plan and look forward to receiving information from you about it.

Sincerely,

Stephanie Kirkes

Stephanie Kirkes
Head, Community Services Department